

*The Curious Memory of Slavery in New Jersey, 1865-1941***By James J. Gigantino II****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v5i1.188>**

This article examines the historiographic memory of slavery in New Jersey through various local and state historical publications from the end of slavery in the state (1865) to the beginning of World War II. It argues that in contrast to the prevailing historiographic contention that slavery's northern past had been hidden until late in the twentieth century, New Jerseyans carried on a vibrant and mostly accurate study of slavery in the state at this time.

New Jersey's long affiliation with slavery ensured that the institution in the state functioned differently than in other northern locales. In New Jersey, slavery died harder, despite the best efforts of black and white abolitionists. That abolitionist battle had begun to make inroads as Quakers merged their struggle against slavery with the revolutionary Enlightenment rhetoric produced by the American Revolution in the 1770s. Together, they illustrated the hypocrisy of New Jerseyans fighting a war for independence while continuing to practice slavery. This rhetorical attack proved futile, however, as slavery represented roughly six percent of the state's population, with concentrations reaching as high as twenty percent in the northeastern counties. Slavery had engrained itself into New Jersey's social, political, and economic framework far too deeply to be rhetorically defeated.¹

Instead, New Jersey became the last northern state to initiate a gradual abolition process that dragged on for decades. Only children born after July 4, 1804 could achieve freedom and then only after serving lengthy terms of service to their mother's master in order to compensate for their

¹ James Gigantino, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 18-63.

economic losses. Gradual abolition served to satisfy slave owners and ensure white control over black bodies in the nineteenth century, especially as fears of radical abolitionism and revolt continued after the news of the Haitian Revolution and the resulting 1804 massacre of the island's remaining white population flooded the Atlantic World. New Jersey's gradual abolition system ensured that roughly a third of the state's black population remained in some form of servitude as late as 1830. Slavery's long presence warranted legal and societal restrictions on the state's growing free black population, guaranteeing the persistence of a racism that excluded them from citizenship and hoped for their total exclusion. Attempts to eliminate slavery as late as 1846 proved futile. State legislators beat back attempts to abolish the institution completely due to economic concerns of their constituents and the state's long history of slavery and racism. The legislature's 1846 law, for example, abolished slavery but required all slaves to become "apprentices for life," a slave in all but name. Slavery in New Jersey only finally died by the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865.²

Most New Jerseyans in the late twentieth century became shocked by the revelation that slavery existed in the Garden State. Historians of northern slavery have chronicled how the public memory of slavery had been largely wiped clean until the 1990s when the discovery of the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan began a whirlwind of new research. Historian Joanne Pope Melish argues that in New England, the erasure of slavery was purposeful. The resulting historical amnesia ensured that slavery's presence in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts would never emerge to challenge a rhetoric that privileged a free, hardworking, and white New England, constructing an identity in contrast to the enslaved South. The American Colonization Society assisted with this process, portraying blacks as unwanted, dangerous, and anti-republican. The

² Gigantino, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 95-115, 213-239.

Society provided New Englanders (and New Jerseyans who enthusiastically supported it too) with an avenue to rid themselves of not only their enslaved history but the actual black bodies who remained after slavery had been dismantled.³

The recent work of Marc Howard Ross, Joanne Melish, and others have shown that this amnesia sustained itself as nineteenth and twentieth century historians saw slavery in the North as an “insignificant sideshow” to the institution’s larger story in the South. Its presence had been largely omitted from textbooks and school curriculum, directing students’ attention to the more economically significant southern institution. The few references that historians did make depicted northern slavery as economically unimportant and largely benign, with slaves being treated better than those in the South. Unlike the South’s preserved plantations, slavery in the North had few physical reminders of its enslaved past since in New Jersey especially, most slaveholders only owned one or two slaves and did not construct the same types of slave quarters as southern planters.⁴

The discovery of the African Burial Ground in New York City launched much public debate on the role of slavery in the North’s past and excited outrage by New York’s black community. Community leaders protested mismanagement by the federal General Service Administration (GSA), who had hoped to build a new office building on the site of a black burial ground. They wanted the area to be declared a national landmark and advocated for the reburial of the 419 slaves and free blacks discovered during the construction. After political battles between

³ Marc Howard Ross, *Slavery in the North: Forgetting History and Recovering Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 48-9, 76-79; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), xi-xv, 2-10.

⁴ Marc Howard Ross, *Slavery in the North*, 48-9, 76-79, 83; Joanne Pope Melish, “Northern Slavery and Its Legacies: Still a New (and Unwelcome?) Story in Bethany Jay and Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Understanding and Teaching American Slavery* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 115-132. For an example of the minor role of slavery in northern historiography, see Joe Trotter, “Pennsylvania’s African American History: A Review of the Literature” in Joe Trotter and Eric Ledell Smith, eds. *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1997), 8.

Mayor David Dinkins, the Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressman Gus Savage who headed the GSA oversight committee, construction stopped and research commenced on the site. By 2003, the African Burial Ground National Monument, operated by the National Park Service, had been dedicated and remains a powerful public setting for the recovery of the North's enslaved past.⁵

The African Burial Ground controversy created a newfound public consciousness about the role of slavery in the North. Historians such as Graham Hodges, Shane White, and Joanne Melish fed the desire to learn more by publishing groundbreaking studies on slavery in New Jersey, New York, and New England in the late 1990s. At the same time, Jersey legislators hoped to ensure that future generations of New Jerseyans would understand the role that slavery played in the state, creating the Amistad Commission in 2002. The enabling legislation declared that "the legacy of slavery has pervaded the fabric of our society...all people should know of and remember the human carnage and dehumanizing atrocities committed during the period of the African slave trade and slavery in America and of the vestiges of slavery in this country."⁶ It therefore created a commission to implement educational workshops and teacher training on this history for the betterment of New Jersey's students. By 2008, the state legislature officially apologized for the state's role in perpetuating slavery, the first northern state to do so.⁷

⁵ Marc Howard Ross, *Slavery in the North*, 24-29.

⁶ AN ACT establishing the Amistad Commission and supplementing chapter 16A of Title 52 of the New Jersey Statutes, August 28, 2002, https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2002/Bills/PL02/75_.HTM.

⁷ Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 270, November 8, 2007, https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2006/Bills/ACR/270_11.PDF. For examples of important works specifically on the North since the 1960s, see Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973); Robert Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (New York: Greenwood, 1982); Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Graham Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey 1665-1865* (Madison, NJ: Madison House, 1997); Graham Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone:*

Historians, however, began to recover the history of northern slavery far earlier than it reentered the public consciousness. By the 1940s, African American historians pioneered the study of slavery in the North, with Lorenzo Johnston Greene's publication of *The Negro in Colonial New England* after he earned a PhD at Columbia University in 1942. For the history of slavery in New Jersey, building on the scholarship of several early *Journal of Negro History* articles published in the 1920s, New Jersey native and fellow Columbia University alumnus Marion Thompson Wright, the first African American woman to earn a PhD in History, wrote extensively on the history of African Americans in her home state. In 1943, she published what became the first of many articles that detailed New Jersey's convoluted relationship with slavery. Simeon Moss, the first African American to earn a graduate degree from Princeton University, followed in 1950 with a study that unveiled the persistence of slavery in New Jersey. This then became the high watermark of studies on slavery in New Jersey. The neo-progressive social turn of history in the 1960s and 1970s that focused on the role of women, poor whites, and the enslaved soon produced significant scholarship on slavery in New Jersey, with Arthur Zilversmit's *The First Emancipation* appearing in 1967, which remains the controlling work on the legal and social history of slavery across the North. Giles Wright, Clement Price, Frances Pigeon, and many others followed in the 1980s and 1990s to unearth the history of slavery in New Jersey, creating a

The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); David Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Leslie Alexander, *African or America? Black Identity and Political Activity in New York City, 1784-1861* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Margot Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kenneth Marshall, *Manhood Enslaved: Bondmen in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century New Jersey* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

vast network of scholars interested in continuing the work that Marion Thompson Wright had begun a half century earlier.⁸

The amnesia cured by the efforts of African American historians in the 1940s has been pervasive in the historiographic debate concerning slavery in the North. As Marc Howard Ross notes in his recent work, northern slavery “was rarely raised in public settings” and though a few local histories contained “some details of both enslaved and free blacks who lived in them,” there remained “far too little use of local records that contained references to” the North’s enslaved past.⁹ From the 1860s to 1930s, New Jersey actually had a vibrant discussion of its enslaved past far earlier than that of Marion Thompson Wright. Local historians shared numerous articles about the tenor of African American life, the harshness of slavery and the slave trade, and the dynamic role that slavery played in great detail using local sources. In this way, New Jersey’s historians adopted a core tenant of the argument about slavery’s harshness that abolitionists had first put forward, that slavery “entailed extremely harsh material conditions of life for the typical slave.” This reality became important in battling the paternalistic and southern apologist interpretations of Ulrich B. Phillips, who in the early twentieth century had become the controlling dean of slavery historiography. With only a few exceptions in the late nineteenth century and during the Great Depression, New Jersey historians resisted Phillips’ historiographic pull and continued to unearth not only the state’s enslaved past but slavery’s harshness and violence as well.¹⁰

⁸ Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (New York: Columbia University, 1942); Marion Thompson Wright, “New Jersey Laws and the Negro.” *Journal of Negro History* 28:2 (April 1943): 156-199; Marion Thompson Wright, *The Education of Negroes in New Jersey* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971); Giles Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1988); Francis Pigeon, *Blacks in the Revolutionary Era* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1976).

⁹ Marc Howard Ross, *Slavery in the North*, 78.

¹⁰ Robert William Fogel, *The Slavery Debates, 1952-1990: A Retrospective* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 6-7.

The resistance most New Jersey historians exhibited to the Phillips' tradition might come from the fact that New Jersey's enslaved past was not as far distant. After all, slavery's incredibly slow death in New Jersey meant that local historians and the first group of professional historians in the late nineteenth century were only one or, at most, two generations removed from slavery. In New England and even in Pennsylvania, slavery died much earlier, meaning that more than eighty years separated historian from the enslaved. In New Jersey, it was less than thirty in some cases, meaning that historians who began to unearth the state's past relationship with slavery knew of its existence in their own lifetimes and therefore sought out the records to write more effectively about it. This closeness, in one particular case, actually generated an apologist argument of its own, predating the Phillips turn by about twenty years. Even with that though, the memory of slavery in New Jersey provides a valuable counterpoint to the pervading historiography that sees the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as void of serious discussions of northern slavery.

Forgotten Conversations

The New Jersey Historical Society, formed in January 1845, became the center of inquiry into New Jersey's past. The *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, published since the organization's founding, contain significant references to slavery and illustrate a detailed use of primary sources to understand slavery's role in the state. The first post-Civil War reference to slavery in *Proceedings*, an 1869 address memorializing former Society president James Parker, revealed Parker's role in combating the famous case of Jacob Van Wickle's slave trading ring. In 1818, Van Wickle's allies illegally shipped dozens of Jersey slaves from Perth Amboy to Louisiana, a case not fully examined until the 1990s. The address's author, Richard Field, relied largely on records from Parker's time in the state legislature, though he also illustrated Parker's role as foreman of the Middlesex County Grand Jury through legal records of the battle against

Van Wickle and his allies. In his interpretation, Field clearly detailed “that public sentiment at that time was not very much shocked by these practices...it was found very difficult to put a stop to that abomination so long the disgrace of our country—the domestic slave trade.” Field further detailed Parker’s support of anti-slave trading activity in the legislature and for the American Colonization Society. Such an early retelling of New Jerseyans’ lack of support for the enslaved illustrates that in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the state’s largest historical organization did not quickly forget the state’s enslaved past.¹¹

Of course, national historians in the post-war period also discussed slavery in New Jersey, the most prominent being George Bancroft, whose multi-volume *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent* became the standard work for decades. Bancroft fell victim to numerous abolitionist arguments related to slavery, specifically the idea of northern superiority. To Bancroft, “the south was the seat of wealth and of weakness” while the “poverty and vigor of the north would always be the safeguard of the republic.” In perhaps the most powerful statement that still pervades some interpretations of northern slavery to the present day, Bancroft argued, “in the north, the severity of the climate, the poverty of the soil, and the all-pervading habit of laborious industry among its people...set narrow limits to slavery.”¹² The majority of Jersey historians, however, did not adopt Bancroft’s contention that northern slavery was limited due to the climate and the caliber of whites who lived there. Joseph Atkinson, a historian who published an account of the history of Newark in 1878, three years after Bancroft’s updated volume appeared, cited Bancroft to discuss the role of Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret and the

¹¹ Richard Field, “Address of the Life and Character of the Hon. James Parker...” *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Second Series, 1: 1 (January 1869), 116-19; Frances Pingeon, “An Abominable Business: The New Jersey Slave Trade, 1818,” *New Jersey History*, 109: 3-4 (February 1991), 14-35; James Gigantino, “Trading in Jersey Souls: New Jersey and the Interstate Slave Trade,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 77:3 (Summer 2010), 281-302.

¹² George Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent*. Volume X (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1875), 350, 353-4 (for quotes).

Concessions and Agreements of New Jersey in 1665, but did not adopt his interpretation regarding slavery. Instead, Atkinson detailed numerous accounts of New Jersey slaves burned at the stake for murder and flogged for non-capital offenses using local newspapers. Utilizing local church records, Atkinson described how three of Newark's churches actually stood on the ground where judicial floggings happened regularly while newspapers and other local records detailed the frequent trading of slaves and even the donation of a slave to the benefit of Newark Academy.¹³

The Bancroft interpretation likewise did not deter local historians in the early 1880s from writing detailed accounts of slavery in county histories for regional consumption. For example, James Snell's work on Hunterdon and Somerset Counties provided meticulous information about the role of slavery in the state, citing the more than 11,000 slaves present in 1790 and the frequent traffic of those slaves in the post-revolutionary period. Even Quakers, according to Snell, owned slaves, with white settlers also enslaving Jersey's Native American population alongside imported Africans. In a detailed discussion of Shrewsbury's Richard Morris, Snell relays that by 1680, he owned more than sixty slaves, while he also highlighted Somerset's own Robert Finley for his pioneering efforts in forming the American Colonization Society. Likewise, William Nelson's history of Bergen and Passaic Counties used legal sources to describe the brutal treatment Jersey slaves suffered, especially in the colonial period. Like Atkinson, Nelson recounted slaves burned at the stake and the multitude who suffered whippings, including the death of one slave after 400 lashes. He even revealed how punishment for some slaves included spending "the night in the

¹³ Joseph Atkinson, *History of Newark, New Jersey Being a Narrative of Its Rise and Progress* (Newark: William Guild, 1878), 170-171.

dreaded swamps of Lodi” where attacks by mosquitos swelled their bodies and caused significant pain and discomfort.¹⁴

Bancroft’s influence on the history of slavery in New Jersey began by the late 1880s to seep into discussions of the system. The most detailed engagement with New Jersey’s enslaved past came from Cornelius Larison, an eclectic teacher, physician, local historian, and most interestingly, an avid promoter of spelling reform. Larison interviewed Sourland Mountain resident Sylvia Dubois in 1883, publishing a narrative of her life where he claimed her to be a 115-year-old former slave. One of the few New Jersey slave narratives, Sylvia in actuality died in 1889 likely at about one hundred years of age. Larison, unfortunately, let the racism of his age enter his discussions of Dubois, remarking that Dubois lived in a “hut” and mocked her “dusky form” and “fleshy” appearance, all indicators of black exoticism and patent racism. Larison’s detailed description of Dubois’ life as a slave, however, never saw wide public disclosure as Larison published it in his own singular phonetic alphabet to curry favor for his interest in spelling reform. The cypher-like text did not receive a translation until 1980, yet her presence in New Jersey and others like her preserved a connection between slavery and the late nineteenth century.¹⁵

Unlike the local histories earlier in the decade, the idea of slavery’s benign nature, its “mild form of the servitude,” continued in the late 1880s and spread beyond Larison’s work. An 1888 *Proceedings* article describing the role of Presbyterian anti-slavery minister Joseph Green spoke highly of the role that white abolitionists played in slavery’s destruction while also using church, township, and legal records to provide a detailed reconstruction of Green’s abolitionism. In that

¹⁴ James Snell, *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of the Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1881), 101-05; William Nelson, *History of Bergen and Passaic Counties, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1882), 96-98, 232 (for quote).

¹⁵ Jared Lobell, ed. CW Larison, *Sylvia Dubois, a Biography of the Slave Who Whipt Her Mistress and Gained Her Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Kenneth Marshall, *Manhood Enslaved: Bondmen in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century New Jersey* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 33-34.

reconstruction, however, the author revealed the mild role of slavery in Morris County during the Revolution that made its destruction far easier than in the South.¹⁶

The 1889 publication of Andrew Mellick's extensive *Story of an Old Farm*, an over six-hundred page historical and genealogical study of the state in the colonial, revolutionary, and early national periods from the standpoint of Mellick's ancestors, was the most important work with this historiographical bent. Mellick's impeccably researched work—for the time—utilized Bancroft and told the “dark side” of the state's past. Mellick was a businessman and real estate investor, struck down by a debilitating spinal disease that left him unable to walk and in extreme pain from 1880 until his death in 1895. In his disabled state, Mellick kept his mental faculties alert by researching his family's history, reliving his previous energetic lifestyle through the heroics of his ancestors. *Story of an Old Farm* became an international sensation. For eleven pages, Mellick recounted the introduction of slaves to the American colonies, the “sad picture of the miseries endured by the blacks while on the voyage from Africa,” the stench of the slave ship, and the central role that Rhode Island and other northern ports played in the slave trade. Scenes of savage treatment of recalcitrant slaves in New Jersey abound in *Story of an Old Farm*, specifically the treatment of his family's slaves Dick, Nance, and Yombo. Mellick deviates from earlier works by showing how slaves “soon fell under the sway of kindly influences and became almost portions of their owners' families. They were comfortably clad; when sick, well cared for” and even in the 1880s, Somerset County's older citizens told “pleasant tales of the affection existing between” master and slave.¹⁷ Mellick's own personal connection to his family's enslavement of African Americans perhaps led him to make this argument to minimize his family's culpability, though the

¹⁶ “Slavery in the Colonies,” *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Second Series, X:1 (1888), 223.

¹⁷ Andrew Mellick, *The Story of an Old Farm or Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century* (Somerville, NJ: The Unionist-Gazette, 1889), 220-227, quote on 225.

pervasive racism inherent in the North in the late 1800s likely also had influenced Mellick's interpretation just as it did Larison.¹⁸

This same idea of the beloved slave serving paternalistic whites appeared in numerous obituaries in the late nineteenth century of aged slaves who had served their masters faithfully for many years and had entered into local lore. For example, an 1892 Methodist affiliated *Christian Advocate* article described the death of New Jersey's "Last Negro Slave" in Morristown. Jinny, purchased in 1796 by the Cutler family, died at age 106 after living most of her life mentally disturbed. Buried after a service at the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Morristown, the article described how "she was followed to the grave by eleven members of her old master's family" along with a Cutler family member that she had nursed in infancy.¹⁹

In almost all subsequent works on slavery in New Jersey, authors cited Mellick's book but only a few replicated his argument of the well cared for slave, making his work the primary source of this line of argument for New Jersey. The turn towards the Bancroft/Mellick interpretation of New Jersey's past hit its climax with the publication of Henry Schofield Cooley's *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey*, his dissertation from Johns Hopkins in 1896. Among the first generation of professional historians educated in the United States in the German tradition, Cooley's work remained the only full-length study of slavery in New Jersey until Graham Hodges' book on East Jersey and New York in the late 1990s. Cooley, a native of Summit, studied with renowned historian Herbert Baxter Adams, a founding member of the American Historical Association and its first secretary. He represented a cadre of other Adams' students, including Fredrick Jackson Turner and Woodrow Wilson, many of whom published works in Johns Hopkins' own *Studies* series from 1883 until the turn of the century. These works represented a historical attempt to

¹⁸ Marshall, *Manhood Enslaved*, 29-39.

¹⁹ *Christian Advocate*, August 18, 1892; Marshall, *Manhood Enslaved*, 37-38.

engage in a scientific and objective study of slavery, avoiding discussions of morality or previous attempts at neo-abolitionism or southern apology. Cooley's work did just that. His dissertation squarely fits historian Stanley Elkins' later description of this scientific school: it appeared "uninterested rather than disinterested."²⁰ Cooley's dissertation, like the others produced at Johns Hopkins, utilized a vast treasure trove of information from a variety of sources to retell slavery's slow death in New Jersey but in a remarkably dispassionate way. His extensive use of state Supreme Court cases, rivaling that of legal and social historians of the 1970s and 1980s, illustrated the multiple legal shifts slavery went through after gradual abolitionism began in 1804 and especially the status of children born to slave mothers under the gradual abolition system. The influence of Mellick though is evident in the work's last four pages. There, Cooley identifies that "the laxness of morals ordinarily found among African slaves was present in New Jersey" while he cited Mellick specifically to make the point that "slaves were, on the whole, well treated in New Jersey," living "in close personal relations with the master's family" with many even learning to play "the violin with considerable proficiency."²¹ Scholars produced from the Johns Hopkins' tradition became incredibly important as they took up open positions in universities across the country and taught their version of northern slavery to the next generation of students. Cooley, after a stint teaching at Salt Lake City College in Utah, returned to New Jersey to teach at Paterson High School, likely repeating much of what his dissertation had unveiled about slave's happy status.

²⁰ Trent Watts, *One Homogeneous People: Narratives of White Southern Identity, 1890-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 119.

²¹ Henry Cooley, "A Study of Slavery in New Jersey," (PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1896), 55-58, quote on 57; Watts, *One Homogeneous People*, 118-121; Raymond Cunningham, "The German Historical World of Herbert Baxter Adams, 1874-1876," *Journal of American History*, 68:2 (September 1981), 261-75. For similar treatment of slavery in the North from the Hopkins' school, see Bernard Steiner, *History of Slavery in Connecticut* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1893).

Though the Hopkins' tradition remained important for work on slavery in other northern states, for the fifteen years after Cooley's dissertation, no other New Jersey historian replicated his or Mellick's argument. On the contrary, physician and amateur historian John Stevenson, published a detailed description of a slave bill of sale in 1898 that included a legal accounting of laws regarding the permissibility of slavery in New Jersey. He clearly indicated that "New Jersey was a slaveholding province" and "for 150 years New Jersey was a slave colony and state," having only "been free a little over half a century" even though he continued to call African slaves "meeker" than American Indians.²² The more extensive "Story of the Slave" by Alfred Heston of the Monmouth County Historical Association in 1902 returned to the tradition of detailing Jersey slavery from its beginnings in the colonial period—complete with references to slave burnings—to, in his case, the late nineteenth century. Heston argued that northerners retained a strong interest in slavery and slave trading along with the failures of the 1804 gradual abolition law to terminate slavery. Heston reiterated the 1846 law's conversion of slaves to apprentices for life and therefore the long-lasting role that slavery played in the state. Unlike other historians, Heston brought his narrative to 1880, discussing the battle in the State Senate to remove "the last vestige of slavery in New Jersey," a law that allowed masters to take their slave "to the public workhouse to be whipped" and which "had remained on the statute books" even after the Thirteenth Amendment had banned the institution. Heston's work, however, is remarkable in another way. He cited both Bancroft and Mellick—almost plagiarizing Mellick in several places—but never adopted their viewpoint of slaves' contentment in northern slavery.²³

²² John Stevenson, "Bill of Sale of a Negro Slave in New Jersey in Colonial Days," *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, 29:4, (October 1898), 221.

²³ Alfred Heston, "Story of the Slave. Paper read before the Monmouth county historical association on October 30, 1902 wherein is given some actual account of slavery and servitude in New Jersey with notes concerning slaves and redemptioners in other states." (Camden: Sinnickson Chew and Sons, 1903), 5-17, quotes on 12-13.

The following year's publication of AQ Keasbey's "Slavery in New Jersey" in the more widely read *Proceedings* likewise rejected the Cooley-Bancroft interpretation of Jersey slavery and continued to use detailed local records to reconstruct slavery's role in the state. Keasbey, publishing several articles in *Proceedings* from 1904-1907, produced a well-researched legal and political look at how New Jersey "was, in a legal sense, a slaveholding state until that (13th) Amendment took effect" in 1865. Again, starting in 1665 with Berkeley and Carteret, Keasbey showed that legislators "evidently considered that the property of the Master must be more carefully guarded than the rights of the slave himself" and eventually passed a state constitution in 1776 that "contained no declaration of rights inconsistent with the existence of human slavery in the state." Keasbey investigated the 1844 state Supreme Court case that hoped to destroy slavery by using the preamble to the state's new 1844 constitution while detailing roughly a dozen other Supreme Court cases to study slaves in New Jersey in more depth than Cooley did ten years before. Like Heston, Keasbey extensively cited Mellick's *Story of an Old Farm* and even used some of his detailed discussions of slaves burned at the stake, yet omitted Mellick's interpretation of the contentment of slaves.²⁴

In 1906, Austin Scott moved beyond Keasbey with his paper on the African Association of New Brunswick to the New Brunswick Historical Society, which constructed the most progressive look at slavery yet. Scott utilized Mellick and Cooley but did not integrate their contentment doctrine. Instead, Scott's work did the opposite—it humanized slaves like had never been done before. Scott began with a short rendition of the history of slavery in New Jersey from colonial times to the Civil War that included slave burnings, the 1804 abolition law, the failure of the 1846 abolition law, and utilized several newspapers, reproducing some of them, to detail the

²⁴ AQ Keasbey, "Slavery in New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Third Series, Volume IV (1901-1905), 96, 150 (for quotes). Also see Volume V (1906-07), 14-20, 79-86.

history and popularity of slavery in New Brunswick. His main argument though, revolved around the African Association of New Brunswick, a benevolent society formed in 1817 by a combination of enslaved and free blacks to support a school controlled by the Presbyterian Church to educate those interested in colonizing Liberia. The records of the Association, now housed in Rutgers-New Brunswick's Special Collections Library, contained permission certificates for various slaves to be members of the organization. Scott mentions, by name, several of these slaves and reproduces those certificates, placing the focus on African Americans themselves in a way few other historians of the time did. In this way, despite using Cooley and Mellick's previous work to write his paper, Scott provided a measure of black autonomy and agency unheard of at the turn of the twentieth century by white scholars.²⁵

Local historians continued this tradition with Ralph Ege's *Pioneers of Old Hopewell* detailing numerous accounts of violence against slaves, while Alexander MacLean's article from the Hudson County Historical Society on the Underground Railroad described the large number of slaves present in Bergen County. MacLean's 1908 article likewise discussed the failure of the 1846 abolition law and only that the Thirteenth Amendment destroyed slavery in 1865.²⁶ Remarkably, New Jersey's Progressive era local historians managed to resist the historiographic pull of Ulrich B. Phillips, the father of the controlling historiographic interpretations on slavery until the revisionism of Kenneth Stampp in the 1950s. Phillips sympathetic understandings of slavery rejected Cooley's dispassionate look at slavery and instead adopted the Dunning's School's pro-southern perspective. Phillips focused on slavery through the eyes of the master,

²⁵ Austin Scott, "The African Association of New Brunswick," Paper read before the New Brunswick Historical Society, 1906; Gigantino, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 127-28, 184-85.

²⁶ Ralph Ege, *Pioneers of Old Hopewell with Sketches of Her Revolutionary Heroes* (Hopewell, NJ, Race & Savidge, 1908); Alexander MacLean, "The Underground Railroad in Hudson County" *Historical Society of Hudson County*, Papers no.3 (October 30, 1908), 3-4.

utilizing plantation records to create a patently racist interpretation of the institution.²⁷ With no plantation records to mine, New Jersey's Progressive era historians continued to utilize detailed legal and governmental records to reveal more about slavery. In 1914, for example, the *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* published an article that publicized the extensive military record of Samuel Sutphen, a black revolutionary war veteran, utilizing federal pension records and associated state military records to demonstrate the remarkable career of an enslaved Patriot soldier.²⁸ Likewise, in the debate over women's suffrage raging in the late 1910s, Jersey women made an argument for their own rights by illustrating that New Jersey had become the last northern state to abolish slavery. A corrupt legislature had stripped both free white women and free blacks of the right to vote in 1808.²⁹

By 1924, with the Phillips' school firmly entrenched across the nation, Charles Knapp's study *New Jersey Politics during the Civil War and Reconstruction* established in its first five pages the past history of slavery in the state and the "great hardship" that its extinction caused to masters and abolitionists alike without demonizing slaves like Phillips would have. The last Progressive era article appeared in the *Proceedings* in 1924, a twenty-page look at emancipation in the state by D.H. Gardner of Massillon, Ohio. Gardner produced an exhaustive study of slavery from the colonial period to the Civil War with detailed use of legislative and court records as well as manuscript collections including the journal of Quaker John Woolman discussing the role that the Society of Friends played in the abolition movement. Unlike the dominate Phillips' school, Gardner produced a measured and factual account of the legal and political system of slavery in

²⁷ John David Smith, "WEB Du Bois and Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Symbolic Antagonists of the Progressive Era," *The Centennial Review* 24:1 (Winter 1980), 88-92.

²⁸A. Van Doren Honeyman, ed, "The Revolutionary War Record of Samuel Sutphen, Slave" *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* 3 (1914): 186-90.

²⁹ "The Defeat of Woman Suffrage in New Jersey" *The Independent*, November 1, 1915.

operation in New Jersey utilizing Bancroft, Cooley, and Mellick. Mellick's interpretation did infect Gardner's work as he included a single line noting that despite their enslavement and severe punishment for transgressions, slaves "seem to have been, in the main, quite happy and contented." However, the fact that Mellick is again the source of Gardner's conclusion as opposed to the Phillips' school shows the independence of historians of New Jersey as opposed to those in other states who Phillips and his students had indoctrinated with their ideology.³⁰

The 1920s also saw the rise of African American historians publishing on slavery through the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, created by Carter G. Woodson in 1915. Of course, historian W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* first articulated a new vision of African American history in the North, but the Association's primary publication, *The Journal of Negro History*, began publishing scholarship on African American history in 1916 and quickly became the focal point for work on slavery and abolition, especially in New Jersey. By 1925, Anne Bustill Smith published a richly researched article on her ancestors, beginning with Cyrus Bustill of Burlington who, as a free black man, supported Continental forces by supplying Washington's troops from his bread, cake, and biscuit business. Moving to Philadelphia, Bustill joined the Free African Society and eventually founded a school for young black students and taught there until his death in 1806.³¹ Carter G. Woodson himself published an extensively researched bibliography of free black households in the United States in 1830 containing strong evidence of the emerging free black community in New Jersey as slavery declined. Woodson and Bustill's work differs from those produced by previous white authors in that their focus rests on the individual African American, not the legal and political system in operation in New Jersey.

³⁰ DH Gardner, "The Emancipation of Slaves in New Jersey" *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* IX: 1 (January 1924), 9.

³¹ Anna Bustill Smith, "The Bustill Family," *The Journal of Negro History*, 10:4 (October 1925), 638-644.

This focus on African American life became critical to white historians in the 1950s after they rejected the Phillips school and turned their focus to the role that the institution played in black lives themselves.³²

In the midst of the Great Depression, few historians published on slavery in New Jersey, though the two that did allowed the Phillips' argument to color their rendering of slavery, reversing the trend seen earlier in the twentieth century. In 1930, Irving Stoddard Kull, a Professor of History at Rutgers, published a chapter on the history of slavery in his longer multi-volume edited work, *New Jersey: A History*. Kull discussed the role slavery played at length in New Jersey, revealing the close relationships slaves and masters due to smaller slaveholdings and the variety of occupations slaves held. However, citing UB Phillips' work, Kull described how the slave in New Jersey was "still bound by his savage inheritance with no speech but an African dialect and few guides but his jungle taboos" until he "had appropriated the clothes, speech, and manners of the white man." Overall, Kull argued that "slaves were well treated in New Jersey...well fed, well housed, and cared for when sick." His evidence for this assertion was an extensive 'recollection' by a slaveholder and several block quotations of Andrew Mellick's *Story of an Old Farm*. With this, the Phillips school and Mellick's racism merged for the first and only time.³³

Like Kull's work, the *Proceedings* published one article in the 1930s that referenced slavery and followed the Phillips' argument. In 1931, Charles Boyer published "Jersey Justice in Olden Days," which revisited the harsh punishment of slaves in the colonial period. Boyer, however, utilized some of the racist interpretations that Phillips' students had circulated in the

³² Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro heads of families in the United States in 1830, together with a brief treatment of the Free Negro* (Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1925); Trotter, "Pennsylvania's African American History," in Trotter and Smith, eds. *African Americans in Pennsylvania*, 8-9.

³³ Irving Stoddard Kull, "Slavery in New Jersey" in Irving Kull, ed, *New Jersey: A History*, Volume II (New York: American Historical Society, 1930), 727-33.

historical community by arguing that the harshness of slave punishments was required since slaves were “from the wilds of Africa and had been subjected to the harshest sort of treatment before” their transport to the American colonies, and that “Unless kept well in hand their old traits were apt to reappear.” Boyer and Kull, though, seem to be anachronisms, since no other works from the twentieth century about New Jersey represent slaves in such a negative light as Mellick had in the 1880s. At this same moment, the reverse was actually happening. The Works Progress Administration, through the New Jersey Historical Records Survey, dug deep into local and county archives to catalog and publish dozens of volumes of records that made the study of state and local history that much more accessible for the future. Although from one of the counties with the least number of enslaved, survey members published detailed slave documents from Gloucester County, the first publication in history of slave documents in the state, recognizing the importance of these records for future historical development. These records, along with the work of Woodson and other African American historians in the 1920s, set the stage for the resurgence of interest and engagement in New Jersey’s African American past in the 1940s and beyond instead of more decades of Phillips’ arguments.³⁴

Conclusion

In the end, New Jersey’s sordid relationship with slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century continued far after emancipation. Unlike historians in many other states, New Jerseyans engaged deeply in the history of slavery throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, laying the groundwork for the eventual larger engagement with African American history in the second half of the twentieth century. With only a few exceptions, local New Jersey historians used

³⁴ Charles Boyer, “Jersey Justice in Olden Days,” *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* XVI: 3 (July 1931), 263; *Historical Records Survey in New Jersey: Description of its Purpose, account of its Accomplishments, bibliography of its publications* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Records Survey, 1941); Gloucester County Series, Slave Documents (Newark: New Jersey Historical Records Survey Project, 1940).

detailed legislative and court records to create histories of slavery well before professional historians and understood the convoluted manner of slavery's slow death a century before scholars published their accounts of the absurdly delayed process. Colored in some ways by abolitionist traditions of the early nineteenth century, these histories remained largely immune to national trends that tainted historical renderings of slavery by the early twentieth century. With the exception of Andrew Mellick's enduring historical account of slavery's benign nature and the momentary adoption of Phillips' racialized argument in the 1930s, state historians tended to not only publicize New Jersey's slave past but produced fairly accurate portrayals of the legal and political system it existed under. New Jersey therefore retains a rich historiographical tradition that kept slavery's memory alive. This made it different from many other states, whose past relationship to slavery had been lost by the Civil War and only recoverable by historians of the 1950s.

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